

## Jewish Ethics and Nonhuman Animals

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*"Man has no superiority over beast." (Ecclesiastes 3:19)*

Westerners have long admired the nature-friendly qualities of Eastern spiritual traditions, such as *ahimsa* and *reincarnation*, which tie human beings to the circle of life that reaches across species and which requires a compassionate approach to all living beings. Yet we have often failed to acknowledge this same beauty—teachings of compassion toward all living beings—in Western traditions.

This article examines Jewish morality with regard to nature, specifically to human relations with nonhumans. The article focuses on creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2, and on fundamental moral teachings such as compassion and peace. The point of the article is not so much to be critical of Judaism, but rather to reveal how much we might learn from the spiritual and moral teachings of the Jewish tradition about our place in the larger universe. Moreover, as Jewish morality from the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) remains important to Christians, this article reveals the ethical standards to which others might hold both Jews and Christians accountable in their relations to animals and the world as a whole.

### The Lost Ethics of the Tanakh<sup>1</sup>

Genesis 1 and 2 the Tanakh, the sacred book of the Jews, provide the Hebrew account of creation. Only these two chapters reveal the world as God *preferred* and *intended* it to be. There is much to be learned about the Jewish vision of God, humanity, and animals in these two chapters. After the fall, which occurs in Genesis 3, God's perfect creation has been changed, and Jews are to strive to recreate the lost universe of the original

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<sup>1</sup> All scriptural passages are from the Tanakh (published by The Jewish Publication Society). The Tanakh became the Old Testament for those of Christian faith. There are differences in these two texts, but no relevant differences in the portions of the Tanakh explored here. Information in this article, based on the Tanakh, is therefore relevant to both Judaism and Christianity..

creation.

Genesis 1 records how the Hebrew deity created the universe in six days, creating light, sky, water, land, vegetation, heavenly bodies, and living creatures. On the sixth day land animals (including human beings) were created. The Tanakh reveals what science has made clear: we are land mammals, primates, Great Apes, created with all other land-animals.

Six times before humans are created, God declares creation to be good, revealing the “intrinsic worth of species... ‘*kol tov*—and it was good.’” The Hebrew deity created a good earth, with many good creatures. The Tanakh celebrates the power and glory of God, who “fashions the hearts” “of all the inhabitants of the earth” and brings forth a multitude of living beings with the breath of life (Ps. 33:14-19). “How many are the things You have made, O LORD; / You have made them all with wisdom; / the earth is full of Your creations” (Ps. 104:24). In the original Hebrew ‘good’ is singular showing us that God views life in all its diversity as a fundamental unity” (Saperstein 14). Nothing is separate, nothing is found wanting. Not one feather or toe is apart from the fundamental unity of God’s creation, and this creation was good in God’s estimation before humankind was created.

Living beings can “find God in and through” creation (Cobb 506-7). God is manifest in burning bushes and whirlwinds, and speaks through a laboring burro, because all are of God, all are God’s handiwork. The creatures of the earth are God’s, they are good, and they are due our respect. “For Mine is every animal of the forest, the beasts on a thousand mountains, I know every bird of the mountains, the creatures of the field are subject to Me” (Ps. 50:10-11). When all of God’s creatures are floating on the ark, it is not just humans that God remembers, but “every living thing.” In the story of the great flood (Genesis), we find that God preserves all species. The earth was created for *all* creatures, perhaps more accurately, for *each* creature, for God caused it to “rain down on uninhabited land, / on the wilderness where no man is, / To saturate the desolate wasteland, / And make the crop of grass sprout forth” (Job 38:26-27). The wild doe of the lonely prairie also has her grass, by the hand of the divine.

The independent, wild creatures are created splendid in both form and function, perfect in their own right, happy about their existence, and not to be controlled or used by human beings. The Hebrew deity speaks of the Hippopotamus (Eiselen 507):

Take now behemoth, whom I made as I made you;  
He eats grass, like the cattle.  
His strength is in his loins,  
His might in the muscles of his belly. . .  
His bones are like tubes of bronze,  
His limbs like iron rods.  
He is the first of God's works;  
Only his Maker can draw the sword against him.  
The mountains yield him produce,  
Where all the beasts of the field play.  
He lies down beneath the lotuses,  
In the cover of the swamp reeds. . . .  
Can his nose be pierced by hooks?  
Can you draw out Leviathan by a fishhook?  
Can you press down his tongue by a rope?  
Can you put a ring through his nose,  
Or pierce his jaw with a barb? (Job 40: 15-24)

The hippopotamus was made just as people were made, fleshy creations of God. All of creation is magnificent, and some creatures so fantastically powerful and huge as to dwarf humans; their lives can only be controlled by God. Yet these great beasts do not consume flesh, but dine on grass, and only God can smite them; in fact, the deity is not their killer, but their provider. God created them to enjoy the produce, which pours down from the playground of the mountain animals, and to lie among the lotuses and swamp reeds. Animals are not here for human purposes, but for God's. Our purposes are not their purposes, and visa versa. The Tanakh even celebrates the ferocity of animals who strike out against humans; the she-bear is admired for her fierceness in protecting her young (2 Sam. 17:8, Prov. 17:12, and Hos. 13:8).

The Tanakh teaches readers that animals are independent of human beings *and wish to remain independent*. God reminds humans that “certain areas of God’s creation are outside human control,” *beyond* acceptable and proper realms of human influence (Vischer 9). The creator asks the human animal,

Do you know the season when the mountain goats give birth?  
Can you mark the time when the hinds calve? . . .

Who sets the wild ass free?  
Who loosens the bonds of the onager,  
Whose home I have made the wilderness,  
The salt land his dwelling-place?  
He scoffs at the tumult of the city,  
Does not hear the shouts of the driver.  
He roams the hills for his pasture; . . .

Would the wild ox agree to serve you?  
Would he spend the night at your crib?  
Can you hold the wild ox by ropes to the furrow?  
Would he plow up the valleys behind you? (Job 39:5-9)

God has given wild creatures their own homes in the steppes and salt land so that they are able to live free from domineering drivers that shout at laboring burros, free from exploitation as people endlessly strive after profit and material gain. Wild asses and oxen would scorn to bear human burdens or feed at the human manger because “the great creatures of land and sea were not made to serve as our pets or playthings” (Goodman 11). Nor were wild creatures intended as a cheap source of human labor, for profit, let alone as food. God asks the presumptuous and exploitative human: “Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundations? Speak if you have understanding” (Job 38:4). God *purposefully* created nature outside the domain of human beings—even beyond our comprehension. We have no power or place in these wild lands, and no right to destroy the mighty beasts that run free in such places.

The Tanakh speaks against human-centered utilitarian assessments of creation, and explicitly humbles humanity. Humans are but another earthly creature, not very capable, not particularly bright, and often exceptionally trying to the deity. Ecclesiastes reminds that we are but animals, created on the sixth day as were moles and muskrats, given the same life breath, insignificant but for God, from the same hand and destined to the same end:

So I decided, as regards men, to dissociate them [from] the divine beings and to face the fact that they are beasts. For in respect of the fate of man and the fate of beast, they have one and the same fate: as the one dies so dies the other, and both have the same lifebreath; man has no superiority over beast, since both amount to nothing. Both go to the same place; both came from dust and both return to dust. Who knows if a man's lifebreath does rise upward and if a beast's breath does sink down into the earth? (3:18-21)

Biblically we are “not distinguished from other forms of life but identified with them” (Hiebert 139). Consequently, we have every reason to suppose that wherever we go after death, they also go (Phelps, *Dominion* 57). If life per se is precious, then all life is precious. For Jews, any assumption that human beings are more important than other species, or creation itself, is nothing more than human arrogance (and spiritual ignorance), *contrary to the divine plan*.

The Tanakh uses the term *nefesh chaya* (or *nephesh chayah*), which means “living soul” (Genesis 1:21, 24). When the breath of life is put into creatures, this *nefesh chaya* is applied to animals as well as to people (Schwartz 15).

According to Genesis, *the life force, the divine breath that brings will and consciousness, is the same in animals as it is in human beings*. Tragically, our English Bibles hide this fundamental truth by translating *nephesh* one way when it refers to animals and another when it refers to humans.

The King James Version translates *nephesh chayah* in Genesis 1:21 and 24 as ‘living creature.’ Then in 2:7, where it refers to a human being, the KJV translates *nephesh chayah* as ‘living soul’ [or ‘living being’]. But in 2:19, where it again refers to animals, *nephesh chayah* reverts to ‘living creature,’ obscuring the fact that the Bible makes no distinction between the nature of the living spirit with which God endowed humanity and that with which God endowed the animals.

Unfortunately, most modern translators have followed suit. (Phelps, *Dominion* 58)

In the Hebrew text, human beings and animals are *equally* “living beings” (Hiebert 139). The deity does not grant human beings a soul or spiritual character different from that of animals. Jewish and Christian texts written in English erroneously translate these passages to create a distinction where there is none. The breath of life given by God is the physical breath of *all* animate life.

In the Tanakh, animals are portrayed as having spiritual understanding, sometimes greater spiritual understanding than people: “But ask the beasts, and they will teach you; / The birds of the sky, they will tell you, / Or speak to the earth, it will teach you; / The fish of the sea, they will inform you. / Who among all these does not know / the hand of the LORD has done this?” (Job 12:7-9). Animals better discern who is in charge than do humans. “An ox knows its owner, / An ass its master’s crib: / Israel does not know, My people takes no thought” (Is. 1:3). Proverbs advises people to look to ants to learn how to accomplish much: “Lazybones, go to the ant; / Study its ways and learn. / Without leaders, officers, or rulers, / It lays up its stores during the summer, / Gathers in its food at the harvest.” (6:6-11). The regular, dependable actions of migrating flocks are compared with the irregular, uncertain behavior of humans. Turtledove, swift, and crane “keep the time of their coming; / But My people pay no heed / To the law of the LORD” (Jer. 8:7). Proverbs praises the smallest of creatures for wisdom:

Four are among the tiniest on earth,  
Yet they are the wisest of the wise:  
Ants are a folk without power,  
Yet they prepare food for themselves in summer;  
The badger is a folk without strength,  
It makes its home in the rock;  
The locusts have no king,  
Yet they all march forth in formation;  
You can catch the lizard in your hand,  
Yet it is found in royal palaces. (30: 24-28)

The Tanakh provides a rich understanding of the deity's relationship with animals. Animals are dependant on the creator for their life and sustenance, and turn to God in times of need, as do people, crying with hunger or thirst (Joel 1:20).

There is the sea, vast and wide,  
with its creatures beyond number,  
living things, small and great. . . .  
All of them look to You  
to give them their food when it is due.  
Give it to them, they gather it up;  
open your hand, they are well satisfied;  
hide Your face, they are terrified;  
take away their breath, they perish  
and turn again into dust;  
send back Your breath, they are created,  
and You renew the face of the earth. (Ps. 104: 25-30)

The relationship between God and animals is intimate, caring, compassionate, sustaining, and personal. "The eyes of all look to You expectantly, / and You give them their food when it is due. You give it openhandedly, / feeding every creature to its heart's content" (Ps. 145:15-16).

Hebrew scriptures allow that humans and animals are created on the same day, that they are all good and cared for by the deity, and that they are equally given the breath of life. But this equality is often challenged by human beings based on scriptural passages, also from Genesis 1, stating that humans are created differently in two significant ways: they are created in "the image of God" and given "dominion" over a vegan world (Gen 1:26-27). While these passages have justified much human arrogance, exploitation, and general indifference toward the rest of creation, such an interpretation is not justified. This is clear when one understand the qualifications placed on our dominion, and when one looks more closely at what it might mean to be made "in the image" of God.

As God tends a creation, so ought humankind, made to rule in the image of God:

God said, “Let the earth bring forth every kind of living creature: cattle, creeping thing, and wild beasts of every kind.” And it was so. God made wild beasts of every kind and cattle of every kind, and all kinds of creeping things of the earth. And God saw that this was good. And God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on the earth.” And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. (Gen. 1:24-27)

In Egypt and Mesopotamia, kings were regarded as in “the image or likeness of the deity” in both “function and position”; the king was viewed as “the representative of the deity, with a divine mandate to rule” (Hiebert 138).

“Rule” means to “have dominion,” “govern,” or “have authority” and is generally used in scripture to indicate the authority of governments over citizens. Ideally, governments “use their authority for the benefit of the people” (Phelps, *Dominion* 51). Rulers that oppress the weak for the benefit of the powerful are “always considered unjust. There is no reason why humanity’s dominion. . . should be judged by any other standard.” (Phelps, *Dominion* 52). We are charged with ruling in God’s stead, we have “special responsibilities” (Cobb 506-7). Hebrew scripture requires humans to rule, and if we use this rule in an exploitative or domineering way, we live contrary to divine intent.

In this light, to be made in the ‘image of God’ grants humans “a unique function... as God’s representative in creation” (Hiebert 138). To “image God is to image God’s love and law... to be endowed with dignified responsibility to reflect God’s goodness, righteousness, and holiness... to reflect the wisdom, love, and justice of God” (DeWitt, “Three” 354). As the Bible indicates: Wisdom is precious, and “all her paths, peaceful” (Prov. 3:17). We rule as God would have us rule, not for our own benefit.

“[I]maging god, we must love the world and take care of it” (DeWitt, “Behemoth” 306). If we have a unique place in creation, it “is to be understood primarily in terms of special responsibility” (Kinsley, *Ecology* 172). Fellow creatures are “to be respected, loved, and helped to attain their purpose according to God’s will” (Hirsch, “Letters”).

“[T]o be created in the Divine Image, state the sages, means that people have the

power to emulate the Divine compassion to all creatures” (Schwartz 16). “The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in kindness. The Lord is good to all, and His mercy is on all His works” (Ps. 145:8-9). Spiritual leaders teach: “As God is compassionate . . . so you should be compassionate” (Schwartz 16).

Hebrew Scriptures qualify human rule, as if suspecting that people might lose sight of spiritual responsibilities. Immediately after the passage in which human rule is granted, it is written:

God said, “See, I give you every seed-bearing plant that is upon all the earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for food. And to all the animals on land, to all the birds of the sky, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is the breath of life, [I give] all the green plants for food.” And it was so. And God saw all that He had made, and found it very good. (Gen. 1: 29-31)

God offered humans an overlordship that “does not include the right to kill animals for food” (Allen 1: 132).

With the diet announced, after the deity explains what we are to eat, that we are to be vegans, creation is completed, and becomes “very good.” Preying on one another is contrary to the deity’s preference for how we *ought* to live. The vegan world is “as God wanted it, in complete harmony, with nothing superfluous or lacking” (Schwartz 2). Humans are to rule, but we are given a vegan dominion enacted in the image of and for God, which does not permit of tyranny or exploitation. In this passage we hear “the pleasure and the delight of the divine viewer” in all that has been created (Allen 1: 132). Genesis 1 reveals the divine preference for a world without bloodshed, without fear and suffering, without predators and prey.

The original creation, in both accounts, was one of pervasive peace, and “Judaism has invariably held vegetarianism to be the ideal God-given diet” (Linzey, *After* 57). In the Jewish tradition, a vegan diet, represents “the high ideal of God. . . stands supreme in the Torah for Jews and the whole world to see—an ultimate goal toward which all people should strive (Schwartz 13). Rav Kook, the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of pre-state Israel, a highly respected Torah scholar, and influential and beloved Jewish spiritual leader, taught that a merciful God could not prefer that humans continue to eat flesh

indefinitely; Kook advocated a vegetarian diet, as have generations of Rabbis (Scwhartz 3, 175, Cohen xix).

Compassion is obligatory for those of the Jewish faith; “God condemns and harshly punishes cruelty to animals” (Regenstein 21). Proverbs 12:10 states, “The righteous man knows the needs of his beast, but the compassion of the wicked is cruel.” The righteous will care for animals, the wicked will not. Rabbinical law ordains that “A good man does not sell his beast to a cruel person” (Regenstein 183). A good human considers the needs of animals above personal profit. The Tanakh records “six things the LORD hates; Seven are an abomination to Him” and the third among them is “Hands that shed innocent blood” (Prov. 6:16-17).

Compassion is at the core of the “Hebrew phrase *tsa’ar ba’alei chayim*, the biblical mandate not to cause ‘pain to any living creature’” (Schwartz 15). The *Shulchan Aruch* (Code of Jewish Law) is explicit about this obligation: “It is forbidden, according to the law of the Torah, to inflict pain upon any living creature. On the contrary, it is our duty to relieve the pain of any creature” (Ganzfried 84, Schwartz 19).

As God is merciful, so you also be merciful. As He loves and cares for all His creatures because they are His creatures and His children and are related to Him, because He is their Father, so you also love all His creatures as your brethren. Let their joys be your joys, and their sorrows yours. Love them and with every power which God gives you, work for their welfare and benefit, because they are the children of your God, because they are your brothers and sisters. (Hirsch, *Horeb* 72:482, Schwartz 24-25)

Rabbi Hirsch, a highly regarded German neo-Orthodox Torah commentator, teaches that this mandate should cause our “heartstrings [to] vibrate sympathetically with any cry of distress sounding anywhere in creation, and with any glad sound uttered by a joyful creature” (Hirsch, “Letters,” Schwartz 17).

Even causing frustration or disappointment to an animal is disallowed in the Tanakh. A paragraph, completed by one sentence in the Tanakh, commands: “You shall not muzzle an ox while it is threshing” (Deut. 25:4). This passage demonstrates remarkable sensitivity to the ox’s appetite while laboring, and to her taste for grains. “At

the time of threshing, when the ox is surrounded by the food that [she] enjoys so much, [she] should not be prevented from satisfying [her] appetite" (Schwartz 9). Such ancient Jewish regulations "bespeak an eloquent awareness of the status of animals as ends in themselves" (Rollin 52). According to Regenstein,

Mosaic law laid down in the Books of Exodus and Deuteronomy clearly teaches compassion and kindness toward animals. Numerous passages forbid the overworking of animals and require that stray and lost creatures be helped. The law handed down by God makes it clear that these injunctions to help animals were intended for the sake of these creatures, and not that of the owner. One was required to help animals that belonged to enemies to whom no obligation was owned, as well as those of friends; one could not 'pass by' an animal in distress.

Even the most holy of the laws—the Ten Commandments—specifically mentioned that livestock must not be worked on the Sabbath. (21)

The Ten Commandments include this requirement: "the seventh day is a Sabbath of the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your ox or your ass, or any of your cattle" (Deut. 5:14, Exodus 20:10 and 23:12). Animals are entitled to a day of rest along with human creatures; this requirement is not only repeated several times in the Tanakh, but listed among the most basic of Jewish laws, the Ten Commandments.

It is not enough to say that kindness to animals is mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. The fact that the welfare of animals is mentioned in the Ten Commandments and that compassion toward animals is the topic of passages in a number of books of the Bible, justifies the statement that compassion toward animals is an important theme of the Hebrew Bible" (Berman 3).

How much more surely today's factory farmed animals deserve a break from their agony.

Not surprisingly, compassionate characters in the Tanakh are rewarded while cruel individuals are punished. Moses was rewarded with a spouse for watering a flock of sheep (Ex. 2:16-21), as was Rebekah (Gen. 24:15-19). Rebekah's watering of camels is "evidence of a tender heart. . . a virtue upon which Judaism lays stress" (Hertz 83). When Rebekah's people prepare for guests—people and camels—the camels are unburdened, bedded down, and fed before humans eat (Gen. 24:32). A "kind man first

feeds his beasts before sitting down to the table” (Regenstein 183).

Maimonides (1135-1204), one of the most influential Jewish theologians, interpreted the repeated biblical injunction not to “boil a kid in its mother’s milk” (Ex. 23:19 and 34:26, Deut. 14:21) as protection against acts that harden the human heart (Linzey, *After* 47). Deuteronomy 22:6-7 reads: “[Y]ou shall not take the mother with the young. Let the mother go.” Maimonides taught that this injunction is a *minimum* requirement, and that we ought to leave *both* the young *and* the mother, so that the mother will “not be pained by seeing that the young are taken” (Linzey, *After* 46-47). The disruption humans may cause to other creatures is limited by the Tanakh: Prohibitions such as this reminds people that we “need to respect and reserve the manifold species which God created” (Schwartz 23).

Hunting is discouraged in the Jewish tradition. Cruel characters, those who enjoy hunting, are denounced in the Tanakh. When Rabbi Yechezkel Landau was asked about hunting, he responded: “In the Torah the sport of hunting is imputed only to fierce characters like Nimrod and Esau, never to any of the patriarchs and their descendants (Schwartz 25). The Rabbi concludes, “I cannot comprehend how a Jew could even dream of killing animals merely for the pleasure of hunting”; such trivialization of life is “downright cruelty” (Schwartz 25). Such passages remind readers of God’s preference for a vegan world.

Genesis 2, the second creation story, explains the proper role for humans amid God’s fresh creation. God “took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden, to till it and tend it,” telling the man that he might eat of every tree (a vegan diet) but one (Gen. 2:15-16). Here we find the most explicit account of what human beings—or at least men—are to *do*. But our role is unnecessarily complicated by poor English translations.

The Hebrew word translated in Genesis 2 as “tend” also appears in Numbers 6:24, often translated as protect: “The Lord bless you and protect you” (DeWitt, “Three” 353). “Tend” implies a vitality, a nurturance for “life-sustaining and life-fulfilling relationships.... [It indicates] a deeply penetrating meaning that evokes a loving, caring, sustaining” approach (DeWitt, “Three” 353). As God tends human beings, so should we tend God’s creation.

The Hebrew word for “tend” is often translated as “till” in Genesis 2 (*'abad*), and is translated as “serve” in other portions of the Bible, such as Joshua 24:15: “choose this day which ones you are going to serve—the Gods that your forefathers served. . . or those of the Amorites” (DeWitt, “Behemoth” 204). Rabbi Hirsch remarks that Genesis 2 demonstrates that humans were created to “serve (work) and safeguard the Earth” (Hirsch, “Letters,” Schwartz 5, 16). Genesis 2 reveals man “as the servant, not the master, of the land. It emphasizes human dependence on, rather than dominion over, the earth” (Hiebert 140). Man was placed on the earth to serve and lovingly tend creation. Indeed, the lowly place of humans amid creation causes the Psalmist to ask, “what is man, that You have taken note of him?” (8:5).

Genesis teaches that animals are all created from the same soil, given the same breath of life, and perhaps most remarkably, are all intended as companions and helpers in the task of tending creation:

The LORD God said, “It is not good for man to be alone; I will make a fitting helper for him.” And the LORD God formed out of the earth all the wild beasts and all the birds of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. . . . [B]ut for Adam no fitting helper was found. So. . . . the Lord God fashioned the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman; and He brought her to the man. (Gen. 2:18-22)

Animals did not prove to be “fitting helpers,” so woman was then created *for the same purpose as animals*. God intended that creatures all work together to serve and tend creation, anteaters and hyenas, males and females. This purpose is never revoked, denounced, or regretted. Animals and women are fellow-servants, helpmates with Adam in tending what God has made. Here we have no hierarchy, only working together for God.

Jewish stories do not provide an abundance of animal voices, but the Jewish tradition is not without talking animals. In Genesis 3 of the Tanakh, a snake emerges as a creature like humans in many ways: independent, willful, intelligent. The serpent communicates with human beings in the story of the temptation, and is critical to the human decision to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. The serpent interacts with Eve and Adam as a fellow creature, created by God, cohabitating on earth, a creature who

is capable of making her or his own decisions. Those of faith cannot suppose that God put the snake up to the task of causing the Fall. Genesis offers a vision of the snake as a neighbor, who pauses to chat in the garden, a neighbor powerful in her own right, created with a high degree of independence and self-direction.

In Numbers 22 of the Tanakh, Balak, king of Moab, commissions a professional seer named Balaam to curse the Israelites. En-route to Moab, Balaam beats his donkey three times for reacting to an angel which Balaam cannot see. "Then the LORD opened the ass's mouth, and she said to Balaam, 'What have I done to you, that you have beaten me these three times?' (Num. 22:28).

This passage reveals a tender connection between ape and ass in which the faithful beast asks her rider why he has treated her harshly. The abuser offers an ugly, threatening, small-minded, selfish response rooted in pride, which fails to honor the inherent value of the ass. "Because you have made a mockery of me! If I had a sword with me, I'd kill you!" (Num. 22:29). The beast of burden reminds Balaam of their history, their mutual responsibility, and the relationship they have shared for many years. She challenges his cruel and exploitative rulership, "Look, I am the ass that you have been riding all along until this day! Have I been in the habit of doing thus to you?" (Num. 22:30). Balaam backs down, simply replying, "No."

In this story "the Lord opened the ass's mouth." The ass's comment is really that of God. God denounces the abuse of the little burro who labors under human rulership. This passage "contains a moving and eloquent plea on behalf of beasts of burden everywhere who are abused by their owners" (Regenstein 24). The plea comes from one no less than God, how much more surely would God object to factory farms and animal labs?

Species boundaries that separate humans from all other creatures are challenged in the Tanakh. At one point in the Book of Job, an arrogant and disappointed human laments, "I have become a brother of jackals, a companion to ostriches" (Job 30:29). Ultimately, the human is humbled, and learns that he is not above the rest of creation, but is indeed brother of jackal and companion to ostrich. Through visions of nature provided by God, the arrogant human comes to a new understanding of the magnificence of creation, and of the creator, and he says, "I recant and relent, / Being but dust and ashes."

(Job 42:5-6). Through nature, one haughty man sees the fullness of God and comes to understand his smallness, his flesh and blood body, his primate existence, and repents of his arrogance; he lets go of his assumption that he is somehow more like a deity than a dog or donkey.

The covenant of Genesis 9 also lumps all creatures together. “God’s covenant is with all of us—human and nonhuman without distinction—all are recognized as being equally objects of God’s concern and participants in God’s covenant” (Phelps, *Dominion* 62). Scripture regarding this divine covenant is no less than redundant in emphasizing that God’s agreement is with *all* flesh—and the earth itself:

And God said to Noah and to his sons with him, “I now establish My covenant with you and your offspring to come, and with every living thing that is with you—birds, cattle, and every wild beast as well—all that have come out of the ark, every living thing on earth. I will maintain My covenant with you: never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

God further said, “This is the sign that I set for the covenant between Me and you, and every living creature with you, for all ages to come. I have set My bow in the clouds, and it shall serve as a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth, and the bow appears in the clouds, I will remember My covenant between Me and you and every living creature among all flesh, so that the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures, all flesh that is on earth. That,” God said to Noah, “shall be the sign of the covenant that I have established between Me and all flesh that is on earth.” (Gen. 9:8-17)

Five times this biblical passage asserts that God’s covenant includes “every living creature,” and humans are included with “all flesh,” suggesting that this equality before God is of particular importance. God’s covenant prevents any separation of humans and animals (Linzey, *After* 22).

Hebrew Scripture is centrally concerned with “life on earth” (Berman 43). The Tanakh does not focus on paradise, but on how to live in this world: do “what is good, / And what the LORD requires of you: / Only do to justice / And to love goodness, / And to walk modestly with your God” (Mic. 6:8). Justice does not admit of exploitation,

goodness does not admit of cruelty, and walking modestly with God does not allow humans to elevate themselves above other species.

The faithful are also to live in a way that furthers God's ends, and the "whole Torah was given for the sake of peace" (Schwartz 95). The Tanakh teaches that we have come from a world of perfect peace, and are headed into yet another (Berman 8); violence is not chronic, so there will be "reconciliation, concord, and trust" (Guthrie 598). The prophet Isaiah promises that God's peaceable kingdom will eventually *return* to earth, transforming life as we know it, bringing a time of "perfect peace among people as well as between human beings and the animal kingdom" (Cohen xix). Those of faith are not just to "look" to this day, but actively work to bring about the Peaceable Kingdom. Psalm 34:17 instructs, "seek amity, and pursue it."

Hebrew scripture notes that we will not be the only species present in this peaceful future world. In fact, this future "state of peace and well-being" is "symbolized by the idyllic picture of powerful animals and poisonous reptiles in harmonious companionship with domesticated animals and truly spiritual human children" (Buttrick 5: 249):

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,  
The leopard lie down with the kid;  
The calf, the beast of prey, and the fatling together,  
With a little boy to herd them.  
The cow and the bear shall graze,  
Their young shall lie down together;  
And the lion, like the ox, shall eat straw.  
A babe shall play  
Over the viper's hole,  
And an infant pass his hand  
Over the adder's den.  
In all of My sacred mount,  
Nothing evil or vile shall be done;  
For the land shall be filled with devotion to the LORD  
As water covers the sea. (Isa. 11:6-9)

Animals, and our relations with animals, are an important part of human submission to God's will, of human service to God's ends, the perfect, peaceful world. Rabbi Cohen, Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi writes, "we look at the vegetarian way of life as a special path of worship and as a step forward toward the 'Great Day,' i.e., the coming of the Messiah, the day where 'Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.' (Isa. 2:4) Bloodshed will cease" (Cohen xix).

The vision of a Peaceful Kingdom appears more than once in the Tanakh, not just in Isaiah, but also in Hosea and Job. Hosea prophesies a future covenant "with the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground," a time when God "will also banish bow, sword, and war from the land. Thus [God] will let them lie down in safety" (2:20). The Book of Job anticipates a time when people will neither kill nor fear beasts, but "the beasts of the field will be your allies" (5:23). Hebrew spirituality begins and ends with a peaceful world, a world where people and animals live together harmoniously, without exploitation and bloodshed.

Leviticus states simply: "Love your fellow as yourself" (19:18). "Fellow" or "neighbor" has been an expanding term, from fellow/neighbor Jew, to fellow/neighbor race or nation, to fellow/neighbor human beings. The Tanakh reminds that we are animals; all creatures are part of God's peaceful original world, and animals are critical to the Peaceful Kingdom yet to come. Many people have birds, dogs, cats, squirrels, and cattle nearby, as our neighbors and household members.

There is much to be admired in Jewish teachings concerning nature and animals, and these teachings are also holy scripture for Christians. The Tanakh teaches that all creatures are good in and of themselves, and that the creator remains personally invested in creation. People are created "in the image of God" to serve and lovingly tend creation; animals and woman are created to participate in this divine duty. The Tanakh boldly challenges any assumption that human beings are separate and distinct from other creatures. God enters into a covenant with *all* creatures. Animals in the Tanakh are credited with special abilities, some of which scriptures reveal as a notch above the abilities of humans. Humans are given a mandate not to cause pain; cruelty to animals is denounced and compassion expected. God created a vegan world, peaceful and without bloodshed, to which we will return. Those of faith are to work toward this end, to clear a

path back to the Peaceable Kingdom.

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